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Toyota warns on potentially deadly floormats

NHTSA and world's largest automaker warn drivers to remove driver's side floor mats in 7 models.

By Hibah Yousuf, CNNMoney contributing writer

Last Updated: September 29, 2009: 6:16 PM ET

NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- Lexus and Toyota advised drivers of 3.8 million of its cars to remove floor mats or risk a forced-down accelerator pedal that could lead to a fatal crash.

In statements released Tuesday, the world's largest automaker and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration warned drivers that the removable mats could interfere with the pedal and cause it to stick.

"A stuck open accelerator pedal may result in very high vehicle speeds and make it difficult to stop the vehicle, which could cause a crash, serious injury or death," said Toyota in its statement.

Though Toyota recalled accessory all-weather floor mats in 2007 for similar problems, NHTSA noted that reports of vehicles accelerating rapidly even after the release of the pedal have continued.

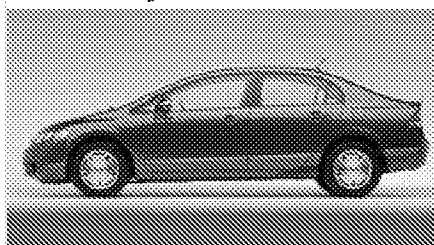
The agency advised drivers of seven different makes of Toyota and Lexus to take caution.

In a statement posted on the automaker's Web site earlier this month, Toyota said that preliminary information from investigators indicated that a fatal crash involving a family driving a 2009 ES350 loaned by a local Lexus dealer in San Diego could have been caused by an all-weather floor mat interfering with the accelerated pedal because of a faulty mat installation.

"There is an urgent matter," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in the NHTSA statement. "For everyone's sake, we strongly urge owners of these vehicles to remove mats or other obstacles that could lead to unintended acceleration."

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Toyota has announced that it will soon launch a safety recall to redress the problem, but NHTSA and the automaker warn Toyota and Lexus drivers of certain models to remove that floor mats sooner for safety.

The Toyota models affected include the 2007-2010 Camry, 2005-2010 Avalon, 2004-2009 Prius, 2005-2010 Tacoma and 2007-2010 Tundra. The Lexus models are the 2007-2010 ES 350, and the 2006-2010 IS 250 and IS 350. ■

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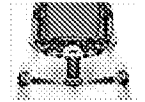
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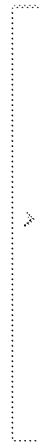
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